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ABSTRACT

The issue of whether teaching methods can influence creativity in the advertising copy writing classroom can best be examined by breaking it into three areas of knowledge access (perceptual, action, and conceptual). One of the perceptions of creativity is that creativity ceases to develop once a student is of college age, and that college itself serves as an obstacle to creativity. An appropriate action is to shift to student-centered teaching, based on principles of psychotherapy and the educational assumptions of Rogerian counseling. The first step in the process may be the deletion of copywriting syllabi. In a copywriting course at a mid-size southwestern university, using the student-centered type of syllabus construction, 46 of 47 students had only positive feedback about the approach. The class picked readings germane to the current topic, invited speakers, and wrote their own versions of assignments, rather than relying on one text. Another action important to the stimulation of creativity is inquiry and curiosity. Each class should contain more interrogatives than declaratives. Conceptually, these practices make sense, but do they work? Determining which of differing teaching methods is more effective is not a simple problem. It is imperative that instructors become researchers in their own classrooms. These suggestions will increase student creativity only inasmuch as the instructor using them enhances and encompasses the passion and pride involved in teaching creativity. (RS)

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Student-Centered Teaching and Creative Teaching Methods As They Relate to Enhancing Student Creativity in Advertising Copywriting

A paper submitted to Teaching Practice and Methodology, Advertising Division
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ABSTRACT

What kinds of teaching methods, if any, can improve student creativity? This paper examines student-centered teaching, based on Rogerian counseling principles, as a viable technique to enhance student creativity. It gives suggestions for implementation and student feedback regarding the methods used. Intellectual development of college students, research on creativity in students and further discussion of teaching goals of working toward creativity will be used in conjunction with Delphi study results of advertising copywriting instructors and their opinions of teaching practices necessary to facilitate creativity.

Today, Valentine's Day 1992, the class is drawing, cutting, and passing out Valentine cards. Students are laughing, thinking, having fun . . . and they're also learning. The class is filled with 19 and 20 year old students who have not done anything like this in years. In considering today's topic, idea generation, in the advertising copywriting class, this exercise seemed particularly valuable. It wasn't what the professor had in mind when entering the class, but spontaneity replaced syllabus and application replaced dictation. All of which is a perfect example of the topic for this paper, can teaching methods influence creativity? The Valentine card exercise and the topic at hand can best be examined by way of the three lines of knowledge access, perceptual, action, and conceptual. (Inhelder, 1958) To increase student creativity demands teacher creativity. Let's break this examination into these three areas of knowledge access and determine if creative teaching can enhance student creativity.

One of the most justifiable charges that can be leveled against our educational system is that is has neglected, and all too often suppressed, the natural creativity of the young. (Kneller, 1965)

What are your current perceptions about the students you now teach to creatively write copy? If creativity has not been valued in their other educational experiences, how can you unleash it now?

It is now widely agreed that a person's creative power grows parallel with his/her body, reaching its' peak in the late teens, when physical development also ceases. From that point on, at about the time they enter college, creative achievement depends on many factors beyond that of imaginative thought. By this time a person's creative potential is more or less fixed. Unlike his intellect, which may continue to grow for many years, his creative capacity is not likely to develop further! Researchers agree that creativity continues to grow until near the end of the high school years, when it comes gradually to a halt and may even decline slightly. (Torrance, 1963)

The main obstacles to the growth of creativity seem to be cultural rather than biological. (Piaget, 1957) In college, the main obstacles to creativity are an over-emphasis on the acquisition of existing knowledge rather than an original use of it, a minutely organized curriculum as opposed to one encouraging the discovery of knowledge for oneself, slavish adherence to the credit system with its incentive to security and "playing it safe",

an over reliance on text books, the use of the lecture system, and the estrangement of teachers and students. (Kneller, 1965)

If creativity ceases to develop once a student is college age, if college itself serves as an obstacle to creativity, how do those of us involved in teaching creative disciplines like advertising promote creative thinking and its' application? How can we heed Piaget's lesson on teaching, "It's not how fast you go, it's how far you go." (Piaget, 1957) We, as instructors, must take the appropriate action.

Action

The following is a list of major traits which contribute to creativity.

1. Intelligence
2. Awareness
3. Fluency
4. Flexibility
5. Originality
6. Elaboration
7. Persistence
8. Sense of humor
9. Independence
10. Union of inner confidence with a capacity for self criticism (Rubin 1963)

If you have a classroom of 30 students who are intent on learning copywriting, you will have 30 different versions of intelligence, 30 versions of awareness, fluency, etc. There will be different levels of breadth and depth of knowledge. So, how then, to begin creative teaching with such varied clientele?

In a recent delphi study of award winning INAME/AAA advertising competition sponsors (translation: The copywriting instructors whose students won top honors) from the past five years, the following list of creative ways of teaching was developed.

1. Recognizing some unused potential
2. Respecting the need to work alone
3. Allowing creative responses to occur

4. Encouragement
5. Allowing assignments to be different for different students
6. Permitting self-initiated projects
7. Reducing pressure-provide a non-punitive environment
8. Respecting potential
9. Enthusiasm
10. Support against pressures to conformity
11. Involvement
12. Communicating that the instructors is "for" rather than "against" the student.

By comparing the two lists provided, you can probably spot some current weaknesses in your teaching, things you do that can hinder the creativity of your students. So, you've already begun the process of teaching change. But let's examine some major paradigm shifts that may be in order.

Student-centered teaching: Based on psychotherapy principles and educational assumptions of Rogerian counseling, student centered teaching is concerned with the internal frame of the students. As teachers we must be able see the student as he sees himself (Rogers, 1951). In the classroom this implies that the teacher keeps the students feelings and concerns at the center of the teaching process. The first step in the process may be deletion of copywriting syllabi. Anyone involved in teaching copywriting knows, and has witnessed, the difference between simply succeeding in a task and understanding what's going on. Without a syllabus, a student is freed from tasks, points, deadlines and an instructor

is freed to concentrate on their learners. Student centered teaching suggests you walk into the class on the first day and say, "We are here to learn the craft of advertising copywriting, what do you want to know?" Then, the class takes its start from the student's questions and comments and continues to build on their needs.

In a recent experiment in a copywriting course at a mid-size southwestern university, using this type of syllabus construction, 46 of 47 students had only positive feedback about this approach. Suddenly they felt valued, intelligent, empowered; and new responsibility for their own learning. It was refreshing for all involved. Let me share some actual excerpts from student responses to the question, "How does it make you feel to work in the class without a syllabus?"

1. "I think that the format used to run this class is very appropriate. If you have to be an open person to be a copywriter, then what good is a structured classroom? It relieves some of the stresses of school. It allows you the relax and work at the same time. Your mind is the main tool for all classes, but your imagination is the root of this class."

2. "I think having a class like this without a syllabus is a different concept and ... I'll say it, it's great. What I like is that you don't know what will happen in class that day, and if you happen to miss out on one day, you might miss out on a lot. I have also discovered that in all my 6 classes this semester, only

2 classes haven't changed the schedule of the syllabus already! With this class, it is important to be creative, and if you have a syllabus, you can follow along the semester instead of expecting the unexpected."

3. "It does make me uncomfortable to a degree. I like to know what I have to do to get a good grade but that makes me realize that I'm going to school for grades and not knowledge. The fact that grades are not emphasized in the class, but "getting it" is, helps me to not be so uptight about grades. Actually, I like not having to worry about how this assignment will affect me (as far as grades go) but enjoy the assignment and have fun with it. Also, without worrying so much about grades weight, it helps to make the atmosphere relaxed and unpressured. How can you be creative when you are stressed about it?"

4. "I like working without a syllabus because it takes the pressure off the class and the teacher. When a syllabus is used, the teacher rushes the class when we are behind and slows the class down if we are ahead. To me, this is completely ridiculous. Any jello mold could teach a class where everything was written down in the order in which it was to be taught. I like the fact that the class can head in any direction that the teacher feels like taking it."

5. "I feel that a class like this, without an assigned text or a syllabus is a great learning experience. It helps me to be

more free with what I am doing because I don't have to sit and study any terms and rely on memorization of facts and definitions. Not having a set grading scale just simply means that my grade is in my own hands because I suppose it solely depends on the effort I put on each assignment. I also feel that a syllabus is stupid because every professor seems to use one, but the boring part of it all is how they sit up in class and read it to us as if we are not literate. I think that it traps the mind, and that is why I am not for a text or syllabus.

6. "I haven't thought about the idea of no syllabus, but now I have to so here it goes! I've thought about it and I like it. College, supposedly is where we grow up and act like responsible human beings. Some professors don't think the same way, because of their attendance policy. But we are responsible to show if we went and do the work if we want with or without a syllabus. If we're expected to complete an assignment and told when it's due, What's the problem? Guidelines are good but aren't really necessary. The world won't collapse if we don't have a syllabus."

Continuing on in the student centered mode, the class picks readings germane to the current topic, invites speakers, writes their own versions of assignments etc., rather than relying on one text. There are no set exams, plenty of peer evaluations and cooperation. Again, in teaching for creativity we must go beyond current practice which values knowing the right answer over figuring things out. In a copywriting class, the courage to submit

an idea of one's own to someone else's scrutiny is a virtue and test in itself! As instructors, we must remember the virtues in not knowing are the ones that really count in the long run. If you check our two lists once again, you'll see how not using a set syllabus, not requiring a text, allowing students to determine class goals, using students to evaluate theirs and other's work are methods that can meet the standards stated in both lists. By making students responsible for the course and the outcome they begin to realize that creation does not spring fully formatted from the mind of the creator but are the products of hard work and continuous trial. The instructor becomes facilitator of learning, granting room and reward for creativity, whatever form it may take.

Another action important to the stimulation of creativity is inquiry and curiosity. An important mission of creative teaching is to whet the student's curiosity about advertising and copywriting as it relates to the world around him/her. The instructor should constantly probe and unsettle the students mind by asking, "What would happen if...?" "How does this influence...?" "What would it be like if...?" We are all guilty of stocking the minds of our students with information instead of encouraging them to see where that information leads. When a student learns about creative strategy he should be asked to draw at least one implication from it, when he learns a particular fact about David Ogilvy, he should be asked to venture at least one generalization to which this fact might lead. Each class you facilitate should contain more interrogatives than declaratives.

As part of the discussion of action, we must consider the

great enemies of action are ignorance, fear, and lack of self confidence. It is our task as teachers to conquer in ourselves and in our students this trio of obstacles. Student centered teaching can make some instructors fearful. But, with time and trial, ignorance is replaced by illumination. You learn right along with your students, you become a true resource for their learning and you create the space for self-confidence to bloom. Your acceptance and trust of the student are repaid with achievement and creating knowledge. Your actions are speaking louder that your words as you develop a student centered class and teach creatively rather than teaching creativity.

Let me leave you with a few more ideas gathered from top copywriting instructors. As you read them, ask yourself what development in the student will take place from this practice, what knowledge may develop, how does this action promote creativity in the student? Then, make a list of your own. Write down the ways you can change your current practices to make yourself a creative teacher.

"During the first week of class, have each student do a 30 second live spot designed to make the other students remember their name. At the end of class, go through all names together. Very entertaining and educational--brand awareness etc."

"Ask students to write down everything they know about advertising, followed by everything they would like to know. This gives you a good deal of important knowledge about your class and

their needs."

"Don't grade the first few assignments. Let them work in a non-judgmental forum for a while."

"Use 5 minute creative warm-ups before each class begins- haiku, charades, even hangman can all be useful- create a creative atmosphere."

"Start out working in groups on first few ads, then keep whittling until they're on their own- let them warm up."

"I ask them to keep a doodle journal, creative ideas, sounds, thoughts, added daily. Creativity becomes a habit of mind."

Conceptual

We have examined the perceptual and action domains of knowledge access as it relates to teaching for creativity. We have given ideas, lists, opinions, and opportunities that can aid in the type of teaching necessary to facilitate creativity. Conceptually, these practices make sense, but do they work? Is there a difference in student centered teaching as it relates to students learning and development? Do these creative teaching practices produce creative results?

There have been studies conducted that actually prove creative teaching equals creative learning and truly makes a difference (Torrance, 1963). However, determining which of differing teaching

methods is more effective, is not a simple problem. Current research presumes that all that is necessary is to teach something by one method and then compare the results with those obtained by teaching the same thing by another method. Unfortunately, few studies have made comparisons over a period longer than one semester. Add to that problems of control groups, the "Hawthorne effect", criterion chosen to research, etc. and it becomes extremely difficult to "prove" the supremacy of one teaching method over another.

It becomes imperative that we, as instructors, become researchers in our own classrooms. In evaluating the reactions of students, in considering expectations of our own and our students, we can develop a "sixth - sense" about the effectiveness of the technique, and then alter and adapt as necessary. Although there is research to support techniques like student- centered teaching (McKeachie, 1959), it's really the teacher's attitude that determines student outcomes.

Enjoyment of our task is not only important for the enthusiasm we communicate to students, but also in determining interest in continued improvement. These important values are likely to be lost if teaching becomes so routinized and depersonalized that it is no longer fun. The motivated teacher is able to respond to feedback from students in order to achieve better and better approximations to optimal solutions to the problems of teaching. The suggestions provided here will increase student creativity only inasmuch as the instructor using them enhances and encompasses the passion and pride involved in teaching creativity.

So, next time Valentines or St. Patrick's or even Groundhog's Day rolls around, throw something new at your copywriting students, expand their opportunities for creating, forget being bound by convention or syllabus, and use your creativity so it can be shared with your students.

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